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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5832  
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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NGO HOLDS SEMINAR ON MASS MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION

¶1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: A local NGO recently held a public seminar on the role of mass media in the democratization of society. Topics covered included an overview on the legal sphere of mass media activity, a comparative analysis of mass media legislation in Central Asian countries, the role of mass media in society and mass media coverage of the geopolitical situation involving the Caspian Sea. Government representatives were invited, but did not attend the event, thus the official view on these topics was not presented.

Nevertheless, the lively discussion by the participants indicated strong public interest in the issues of media freedom. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) At the October 23 seminar, the director of NGO Bosfor, Zalina Rossoshanskaya, opened the event saying that the seminar "Role of Mass Media in Democratization of Society" was held within the framework of the project Legal Clinic, with support of the U.S. and UK Embassies. The project would include six seminars, with this being the third. Previous seminars discussed the penitentiary system and new labor legislation. Bosfor applied for the U.S. Embassy grant of USD 2,900 in 2007 for its project "Mobile Legal Clinic" to provide training and legal consultations to vulnerable parts of the population, and started implementing the project in ¶2009.

NO "PRIVATE" MASS MEDIA ALLOWED BY LAW

¶4. (SBU) In the course of the seminar, Rossoshanskaya gave an overview of the legal sphere of mass media activity. She said that in Turkmenistan, mass media activity is governed by the Law on Print Media of 1991 and article five of the Constitution. The Print Media Law declares freedom of media, bans censorship, and defines the structure and organization of media, its interaction with government, and media's sphere of responsibility. According to the Law, institutions of state power, political parties, public organizations, mass unions, and creative organizations, but neither individuals nor foreign entities, may establish media outlets in the country. Rossoshanskaya explained that there is no notion of "private mass media".

¶5. (SBU) Rossoshanskaya also made a comparative analysis of mass

media legislation in Central Asian countries. Her presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session during which participants raised issues such as censorship, mass media language, and inability of local journalists working for foreign mass media to get accreditation in Turkmenistan. Yusup Kuliayev, an expert on economic and political issues and correspondent for the BBC Russian Service in Central Asia, delivered a presentation on the role of mass media in society. He also talked about mass media's coverage of the geopolitical situation and legal status of Caspian Sea.

NO PARTICIPATION FROM STATE AGENCIES

¶6. (SBU) The event gathered around 20 participants from local NGOs, journalists, youth, teachers and students of local grade schools. Despite receiving the invitation, no government representatives attended the event. Participants at the event underscored the need for new mass media legislation that would allow more media freedom in practice.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The absence of state mass media representatives at the event was noteworthy given that the subject matter dealt directly with their profession. They likely have instructions to avoid public discussion of the topic. Still, their views would have contributed to the overall discussion, and they might have benefited from hearing public views on the subject. In their absence, discussion at the event lacked a worthy counterpoint. END COMMENT.

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